

REVIEW

Donald T. Ariel, Jean-Philippe Fontanille, *The Coins of Herod. A Modern Analysis and Die Classification (Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity – 79)*, Brill, Leiden–Boston 2012, pp. 203 + b/w 96 tab.; ISBN 978-90-04-20801-8; ISSN 1871-6636

Various aspects of Herod's minting have been the subject of analysis and interpretation since the mid-19th century. The interest for them results from the hope of gleaning from the minting further information regarding Herod's political position towards Rome, discovering the contents and objectives of the propaganda efforts undertaken by him, and establishing how these actions were reflected in the coins minted by the Judean ruler. The second important reason for scholars' interest in Herod's minting concerns its numismatic aspects: the production techniques, location of the mints in which Herod's coins were struck, chronology of the various issues, iconography etc. Although these are issues which have been analyzed by several generations of scholars, to date there has been no monographic presentation. Two eminent numismatists who have for years been studying Herod's coins have now made an attempt to fill that gap: Donald Ariel, head of the Coin Department of the Israel Antiquities Authority, and Jean-Philippe Fontanille, an independent researcher specializing in the study of dies of ancient coins. Their work together has led to publication of a book on Herod's coins. The two authors represent different methodologies of numismatic studies. This difference in research methods and method of analysis of numismatic material is visible in the book. Ariel is the author of as many as 11 of the 12 chapters addressing various historical and numismatic issues. Fontanille, on the other hand, writes just one chapter, devoted to the analysis of the dies and minting technologies of Herod's coins (Chapter 4: *The Dies and Minting Technology*, pp. 65–88), as well as all 96 plates illustrating the relations between the obverse and reverse dies of the various types of coins minted during the king's rule. This does not mean, however, that Fontanille's contribution to the work is any smaller or less important. It would be no exaggeration to say that only thanks to the two scholars' joint efforts was it possible to recreate the chronology of the issue of Herod's coins in a way that nobody had done before.

Most of Herod's monetary issues are undated (with the exception of four, which bear the date – "Year 3"), which makes it much more difficult to establish both a comparative and an absolute chronology for them, but also to determine the links between the various issues and the events from the time of Herod's rule as well as the economic and possibly also political actions undertaken by him. Not knowing this chronology makes interpretation of the iconography of these issues difficult, as well as the possibility of ascribing clear propaganda contents to specific images. There is also a lack of agreement among scholars regarding the number of types of coins minted by Herod as well as the duration of the production of each of them. The list of problems to be solved is therefore much longer, as this book reveals.

The book is constructed in a clear way, providing the reader with easy orientation in its contents and the authors' arguments. The first chapters are devoted to a descrip-

tion of the objectives and research methods used by the authors, and the next to the specific problems which scholars face in analyzing Herod's minting. Before going on to their own suggestions for solving these problems, the authors generally present all those hypotheses and interpretations given to date by their predecessors. This form of presentation gives readers the opportunity both to become familiar with the history of previous research and to discern the influence of the authors' methodological approach on the type of arguments they use for the proposed interpretations and conclusions. It is no exaggeration to say that new and important proposals and conclusions can be found on almost every page of the book. Their appearance does not always result exclusively from the research methodology adopted by the authors, but sometimes from their careful analysis of the various issues. In most cases many interpretations suggested earlier were based on the analysis of only selected aspects of the problem. Examples of this kind of approach of previous scholars are provided especially by their attempts to date the issues of Herod's coins from the date found on them, as well as interpretations of the iconography of their obverses and reverses. In the latter case, the spectrum of conclusions, often diametrically different in terms of ideological content of the various representations, is quite staggering. One of the reasons for this as shown by Ariel is that incorrect, unfounded premises are accepted (cf. pp. 99–106).

It is impossible to mention here all the important conclusions that can be found on the pages of this book, owing both to their number and to their nature. A number of them are important for assessing Herod's characteristics as a ruler of Judea and his position towards Rome. Contrary to opinions expressed on a number of occasions, the minting of the ruler of Judea does not give too many reasons to believe that he zealously imitated ideologically alien models and transferred them to his own state. Even if certain foreign models are present in Herod's minting, this did not have any great significance. According to Ariel, the iconography of Herod's coins did not offend the religious feelings of his subjects, and at the same time was rather modest in terms of the number of images used. Most of them did not arouse any social emotions, as some of them referred to the iconography of Hasmonean coins and others to images which had for a long time been rooted in Jewish tradition (pp. 104–119, 172–173, 188).

The majority of the new conclusions, however, mostly concern typically numismatic problems. The most important ones are on the typology of Herod's coins. To date, scholars have distinguished over 20 types of Herod's coins, a number which should according to Ariel be limited to 17 (pp. 42, 59–64), since three ought to be excluded entirely as not belonging to Herod's minting (cf. pp. 53–54). Other important conclusions refer to the question of their denominations (pp. 47–52), techniques of production of coins, the location of a mint (or mints), and the arrangement of legends on coins. An important part of the book is constituted by those chapters which concern findings of Herod's coins in the archaeological context and their geographical distribution. Through analysis of archaeological data, Ariel obtained chronological elements which became a starting point for determining the order of production of the individual series of these coins and time of their duration. Based on this data, even enriched by observations resulting from an analysis of the iconography and paleography of the legends and data regarding the order of use of minting dies in the production of coins from each of the series, Ariel has created a comparative chronology of all the issues (pp. 174–176). This permitted him to

construct an absolute chronology of Herod's entire minting (pp. 185–187). For the construction of both these chronological systems, the relationship between the four series of Herod's coins dated Year 3 and the rest is of crucial significance, as it constitutes the cornerstone of these systems. This date has long been the object of disagreement among scholars, who have also presented arguments for at least several possible events according to which these coins should be dated (cf. pp. 90–92). The most commonly accepted conclusion, which Ariel also favors (pp. 92, 186), is that this Year 3 refers to the third year of Herod's rule over Judea, counting from 40 BCE when he was entrusted with the crown by Octavian and Marc Antony, meaning that the issue of these coins took place in 37 BCE. According to him, there are also reasons to believe that the place of production of all Herod's coins was the mint in Jerusalem (pp. 97–98).

The authors of this book do not concentrate exclusively on numismatic issues. Many interesting observations and conclusions will also be found by those scholars who are interested in the economic history of Judea during Herod's reign. Selected issues of monetary policy and the role of money in Herod's state are the subject of Chapter 2 (*Gold and Silver Coins during Herod's Reign*, pp. 29–42), which concerns the presence in Judea of gold and silver money of Roman and Tyrian origin. Ariel also refers to the question of the supposed issue of gold and silver coins by the Judean ruler. A whole host of other observations on the economic aspects of Herod's rule can be found scattered throughout various pages of the work (cf. pp. 11–28, 140–158, 187).

The conclusions and interpretations contained in Donald Ariel and Jean-Philippe Fontanille's book will no doubt be the subject of discussion and criticism; I am convinced, though, that it will not be easy to reject them or dispute their correctness, as a result of both the research methods used and the representative nature of the numismatic material employed to frame them (the research was conducted on a sample of over 2500 of Herod's coins (p. 65)). It is too common for reviewers to express the opinion in their assessments that the work they are reviewing is "groundbreaking." In this particular case, however, I am certain that such an opinion is entirely justified. The book *The Coins of Herod* will long remain essential reading for any scholar interested in the minting and coins of Herod.

Edward Dąbrowa